

WHY DOLPHINS?

Tetbury people wonder why their town has a pair of dolphins as its town crest. Nobody really seems to know. As far away as Slovakia, well away from the sea there is a town, once an important trading post, which also boasts dolphins as its crest. Their reason given is that of a symbol of trade.

Is that why we have them? Certainly Tetbury was a trading centre for wool, had an active market for many years and was at one time considered the third most important town in all of Gloucestershire. Of course, the Romans had dolphins for decorative purposes all over the place and were in some abundance in this area. Excavations within a few miles radius have brought up many a tesserae dolphin as can be seen in Corinium Museum at Cirencester.

We have some amusing stories to tell of their Tetbury origin, but they are only intended to be amusing. Ask any Tetburian of the story of Sir William de Braose, one-time owner of Tetbury, and his storm-tossed voyage across the Irish Sea and you may get a clue to the origins of the dolphins. There is a pair on the Constables' stave kept in the Feoffees committee room. Some basis may be given to suggesting they are similar in shape to the insignia worn by the domestic staff of the Earls of Berkeley, themselves former owners, but they also appeared on local trade tokens of the time during and soon after the Civil War.

Plenty of examples can be seen in Tetbury with the ones above the church gates particularly good when glinting in the sun. But a really good picture is to spot them on the Market Hall cupola as you drive in towards Bath Bridge and in one view you have the steeple, and with the town flag behind the cupola you have two pairs of dolphins welcoming you into Tetbury.